

28 MEMBERS JOIN STARK, McDERMOTT IN DEMANDING THOMPSON'S APOLOGY FOR FALSE, INAPPROPRIATE COMMENT

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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28 HOUSE MEMBERS JOIN STARK AND McDERMOTT IN DEMANDING SECRETARY THOMPSON'S APOLOGY FOR FALSE, INAPPROPRIATE COMMENT

Secretary Made Claim that Universal Health Care Already Exists in US

WASHINGTON, DC – Today, US Representatives Pete Stark (D-CA) and Jim McDermott (D-WA) were joined by 28 other members of the House in requesting that Secretary of Health and Human Services Tommy Thompson apologize for his remark last week that, “Even if you don’t have health insurance in America, you get taken care of. That could be defined as universal health care.” The following is the full text of the letter:

CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

WASHINGTON, DC 20515

March 12, 2004

The Honorable Tommy G. Thompson

Secretary

Department of Health and Human Services

200 Independence Avenue, SW

Washington, DC 20001

Dear Secretary Thompson:

We were shocked to see your remarks upon returning from Iraq last week. In response to questions about pursuing universal health care in Iraq while we have millions of uninsured Americans here at home, you were quoted as saying, "Even if you don't have health insurance in America, you get taken care of. That could be defined as universal health care."

Mr. Secretary, you owe the American public — especially those who are uninsured — an apology for making such an inappropriate and false statement.

We know you are well aware of the facts. Lacking health insurance has a direct correlation to poorer health. That fact is undisputed. For example, in its analysis of the consequences of lack of insurance, the Institute of Medicine estimates that 18,000 Americans die prematurely each year due to the effects of lack of health insurance coverage. The Kaiser Family Foundation, 2003 Health Insurance Survey found that nearly half of uninsured adults postponed seeking medical care, and over a third say they needed but did not get medical care in the last year. The survey also found that over a third of the uninsured had a serious problem paying their medical bills in the past year, and nearly a quarter was contacted by a collection agency.

In addition, the uninsured are more likely than those with insurance to be hospitalized for conditions that could have been avoided and not receive timely preventive care. "Sicker and Poorer: The Consequences of Being Uninsured", a report by the Kaiser Commission on Medicaid and the Uninsured, found that better health would improve annual earnings by about 10-30% and would increase educational attainment. The statistics go on and on.

While we have great differences in how we may choose to address the problem of the uninsured, we had always thought there was consensus that lowering the number of uninsured was a bipartisan priority. Your recent remarks make us question the Administration's commitment to that effort.

To claim that the U.S. health system -- which has more than 44 million uninsured Americans -- is a universal health system is both offensive and false. We respectfully ask that you correct the record and issue a public statement rescinding your remarks that our health system is universal. We urge you to correct the record as quickly as possible.

We look forward to a public apology and to setting the record straight.

Sincerely,

Pete Stark, MC

Jim McDermott, MC

Charles B Rangel, MC

Robert Menendez, MC

Henry Waxman, MC

Rosa DeLauro, MC

Patrick Kennedy, MC

Jan Schakowsky, MC

Sam Farr, MC

Joseph Hoeffel, MC

Alcee Hastings, MC

Raul Grijalva, MC

Maurice Hinchey, MC

Jose Serrano, MC

Martin Frost, MC

Sheila Jackson Lee, MC

John Lewis, MC

John Conyers, MC

George Miller, MC

Jerrold Nadler, MC

Donna Christian-Christensen, MC

Ed Pastor, MC

Eleanor Holmes Norton, MC

Elijah Cummings, MC

Kendrick Meek, MC

Barney Frank, MC

Dennis Kucinich, MC

Barbara Lee, MC

Frank Pallone, MC

Bernie Sanders, MC